



The Late Cde Hugo Chavez facing the Masses

Once More on the Mass and the Vanguard

The political field of South Africa, within which we live and act, can be divided like this:

- Political Parties and voluntary mass organisations
- Local State: Councils, Ward Committees, Community-Police Forums, School Governing Bodies
- The National State and Provinces: Elected Government, Ministries and Departments
- Big companies and parastatals
- Small companies and Co-ops
- Trade Unions
- Religious organisations and NGOs

Political Parties and voluntary mass organisations include both Mass and Vanguard, and are in turn separate from the State's ways and means of organising the masses.

We have earlier said that the main work of the communists has to be done outside of the confines of the Party, among people who are not communists. The vanguard Party does not define itself outside of the revolution. We have said that the Party itself has mass. The Party has internal democracy, as well as centralism, and the Party's Constitution is a good one. In the discussion of the Mass and the Vanguard, the Party and the Class, we are therefore not talking of two separate entities. We are not attempting to define one, and then the other, and then join the two together. Instead, we are talking of a relation.

We can further repeat what the General Secretary of the SACP has said on more than one occasion: That we as the SACP accept responsibility for this revolution.

The State organises the masses via national, provincial and local demarcations, in elections, and in "Local State" structures. We can see this in Venezuela, where the direct patronage of the state in the organisation of the masses is, or is intended to be, pervasive (i.e. everywhere in the country), touching everybody and including everybody. In South Africa we have a local state, and we also have benefits to individuals and families that are paid out by the state. But we also have voluntary mass democratic organisations on a big scale.

To begin the discussion about mass organisations and the local state, in our attached reading for discussion, we look at Venezuela via George Ciccariello-Maher's interview with Venezuela's Minister of Communes, Reinaldo Iturriza (attached). Reinaldo Iturriza is among other things complaining about what he calls "vanguardism", including in his own Party (the PSUV), but also in the Communist Party of Venezuela.

Iturriza sees the way forward, not through organs of people's power, soviets, or dual power, but in the practice of mass elections. Iturriza seems to believe that the Venezuelan masses will always be "Chavist" and will always vote accordingly. He did not dwell long upon the fact that in the most recent election at the time, the overall margin of victory was only 1.5%.

It is possible that the neo-liberals will win once and then strip the public wealth of Venezuela in record time, leaving no material basis for a resurrection of Chavism. Venezuela will then be like Libya, which as the late Colonel Gaddafi predicted, was turned into "Somalia" in record time; and what Ruth First wrote about Libya may apply as well to Venezuela, i.e. that its ideology is that of class-formation of a petty-bourgeoisie.

Here is some of what we have been able to find out about Venezuela from Internet research:

Reinaldo Iturriza is a former journalist and/or sociologist who was, after the election of Nicolás Maduro to the Presidency in

April 2013, the Venezuelan Minister of the People's Power for the Communes and Social Protection. (All Ministers in Venezuela are currently called “Minister of the People's Power for...”)

In our South African terms, the closest equivalent to Iturriza’s ministry would be the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, while most of its business appears to be having to do with what we would call development projects, such as housing. The funding for such projects comes from central government.

Venezuelan Communal Councils approximately correspond in size to a South African Voting District. Communes, in which at least 10 Communal Councils are joined, form units that would be the size of several electoral wards in South Africa. How these Communal Councils and Communes relate to the Venezuelan voting demarcations is not known by the CU at this time. If you know, please tell us.

The Communal Councils were first formed following the introduction of the Law of Communal Councils in April 2006. By 2009 “30,179 had been created and a further 5000 were in formation”. The process of forming Communes began later, in 2010. (see [here](#))

In Iturriza’s Ministry there are other “Social Missions” and projects with various social purposes. These seem to resemble nationalised non-profit organisations, funded by direct grants from central government.

The South African way of institutionalising People's Power, practised now for over 100 years, is to develop free-standing mass democratic organisations. These are the ones we will look at in the subsequent items within this 7th part of our course.

In South Africa, if the ANC loses an election, the people's voluntary mass-democratic structures will still be in place, as they are today in the Western Cape Province, for example, under the DA provincial government.

This is the reason why the reactionaries are trying so hard to destroy the ANC, the trade unions, and the Party, and conversely it is why we are determined to defend and to grow these mass institutions.

But also in South Africa, on the other hand, we have "Ward Committees". These have sprung from the same kind of patronising thinking that has created the Venezuelan Communal Councils. Both were conceived by, are regulated by, and are paid for by, central government. Instead of being the voice of the people, as they pretend, they are the voice of government.

Mass democratic organisations have the potential to become autonomous organs of people's power during a dual-power revolutionary transition of power from one class to another. Ward committees and the like, including the Venezuelan "Communes", have no such potential.

The living realities of revolutionary Venezuela and of revolutionary South Africa invite objective and subjective comparisons, including in the concept of “delivery” and “beneficiaries”, which infest both of these societies and bring with them the temptation towards “clientelism”, paternalism and filialism.

Our challenge is to bring on something like a Revolutionary Subject of History to have its moment, and then to move off-stage, leaving after all not democracy, but freedom. Lenin’s question, “[What Is To Be Done](#)” is really about that, and Lenin’s book of that title, which we have quoted in the previous part of this course, is itself an Induction into the relation of the Party to the Class, and of the Vanguard to the Mass.

The next (second) item in this part will have to do with the ANC and its Leagues, and SANCO, while noting the mass-democratic women’s movement that could exist, but which has never taken off in South Africa. The third item will deal with the trade unions, including but not limited to our liberation-movement ally COSATU and its affiliates. The fourth and last item in this part will deal with the Young Communist League of South Africa.

- The above is to introduce an original reading-text: [Reinaldo Iturriza, Representation of the People in Venezuela, 2013](#).
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).